

The Chronicle and Index

OF THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

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CONTRIBUTIONS in aid of the gratuitous publication and circulation of the *Chronicle and Index* will be gladly received and acknowledged by the Rev. J. C. Street.

THE social element in connection with our Sunday Schools has been actively developed during the last month. Many of our churches have been usefully engaged in sending or taking their Sunday School children into country towns, up mountain heights, and by sea and lake. The trip into the country has proved a great delight to the young people, and has supplied to them pleasing contrasts with the daily life that many of them are compelled to lead. Nature has opened out new worlds to them, and the fact that the teachers have been with the children has drawn them all more closely together, and associated them with happy memories and inspiring thoughts. In many a coming winter day will the sunny scenes of July be remembered with joy.

THE Annual Floral Service in connection with the Mountpottinger Church took place on Sunday afternoon, July 18th, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. The church was very tastefully adorned, and the front of the pulpit and the windows showed that they had had the special care of the decorators. There was a large congregation present, all the seats being fully occupied, and the pulpit was filled by the Revs. W. Reynolds, T. Leyland, A. Gordon, and J. C. Street, all of whom took part in the service—the address being delivered by Mr. Reynolds. The singing of the children was very sweet, and all who were present seemed gratified with the service. A collection was made at the close of the service to defray the

expenses connected with the Annual Excursion of the Sunday School children.

WE are glad to see that the charming story which appeared in the *Unitarian Herald*, from the pen of our friend, the Rev. J. J. Wright, of Bolton, under the title of “Little Asker, or Learning to Think,” has been published in a very neat and attractive form by Messrs. Swan, Sonnenschein & Co., London. The letterpress and illustrations are excellent, and the binding is strong and pretty. The story itself is full of interest, and never fails to hold the attention of the reader. Young people and old alike are fascinated by the pleasant style and suggestive thoughts of the writer. The book makes a beautiful gift to children, and it should find its way into every Sunday School Library in the kingdom. It may be purchased at the Depository for 1s 3d.

THE Sunday School Association is to be congratulated upon the issue of “Little Chapters for Little Folk.” A more serviceable book for the younger classes in our Sunday Schools has never appeared. Each page is a gem of illustration and letterpress, and in the hands of capable teachers can be made a source of joy to the children under their care. The most beautiful lessons in natural history, religion, and morals, are taught in simple and attractive language. The little book ought soon to become an established favourite among teachers and scholars. It may be purchased at the Depository.

“The Story of Jeremiah and his Times,” by Harriet M. Johnson, just published by the Sunday School Association, is one of a class

greatly needed among the young people of our churches throughout the land. It literally unseals the hidden treasures of the old Hebrew Prophet, and enables the thoughtful young student to get glimpses into his purpose and aims hitherto completely hidden from his understanding. The call and mission of the Prophet are set forth with great simplicity and freshness, and the efforts at reform are vividly portrayed. The chapter on "Hope for the Future" is profoundly interesting, and cannot fail to stir as with trumpet tones the minds of the youthful readers. Indeed it is only fair to say that young and old alike can profit from the study of this little book, and that Miss Johnson, in giving to the public the material which she prepared for her Sunday School class has conferred a boon upon thousands. She has made understandable a writer whose words were often perplexing, but whose thoughts deserve the most careful study and attention. Our readers can be supplied with copies at the Depository.

SUNDAY SCHOOL CONFERENCE.

A SUNDAY SCHOOL CONFERENCE, under the auspices of the Unitarian Society, was held at Ballee, on Wednesday, July 22nd. There was a large number present.

The Belfast visitors to the Conference, numbering 17, started from Rosemary Street in a four-in-hand. The weather on the outward journey was anything but propitious, rain coming down in torrents. But the high spirits of the party did not appear very considerably damped thereby, a continuous flow of good humour being kept up. Hot coffee and a fire for those who had suffered most soon made all comfortable, and none the worse for their journey.

The proceedings of the Conference were opened in the church by hymn and prayer. The Rev. J. C. Street occupied the chair, and among those present were—Rev. Thomas Dunkerley, B.A.; Rev. David Thompson, Rev. Joseph H. Bibby (*Pastor loci*), Rev. E. Solly Anthony, M.A.; Rev. J. A. Kelly; and Messrs. T. McClelland, J.P.; R. McCalmont, F.C.S.;

David Moore, Dr. Polly; and the congregation at Ballee was well and largely represented.

The CHAIRMAN, in opening the proceedings, referred to the pleasure which it gave him to occupy the position which he held. He however felt one regret about it, that he was taking the position which had been held by their old friend Mr. Darbishire, whose loss they all so much felt. The speaker also referred to the pleasure it gave him to be at Ballee, and to see so good an attendance there. He was also glad to have the opportunity of listening to his old friend Mr. Thompson, who was to give the paper that day. Mr. Thompson was to tell them what our Sunday Schools are, and to point out what they ought to be.

He then called on Mr. Thompson to read his paper.

The Rev. D. THOMPSON then read the following Paper:—

OUR SUNDAY SCHOOLS AS THEY ARE, AND AS THEY MIGHT BE.

"We are met together this afternoon as fellow-labourers in a great and sacred cause. In response to the kind invitation of Mr. Bibby and our Ballee friends, we have come from our various homes and spheres of usefulness, with a view to help and encourage one another by a free interchange of thought and sentiment, and a manifestation of sympathy and good feeling. Living as we do for the most part somewhat isolated, and carrying on our labours in our respective localities in the manner which commends itself to us individually, it is well that at Conferences like the present we should have an opportunity of meeting friends from other places, that we should compare notes, talk over matters of common interest, benefit by ripe experience and wise suggestion, and thus be stimulated in striving after something higher and nobler than we have yet realised. Even if they did nothing but evoke fraternal sympathy, our Conferences would serve a useful purpose.

Our presence here is an indication that we are all interested in Sunday Schools. Most, if not all, of us have given some proof of our interest in years gone by in services willingly

rendered, and, let us trust, not altogether barren in result; and, as time rolls on, we feel that the necessity for the Sunday School has not lessened, but rather increased, as its function as a moral and religious agency has been more clearly recognised.

We are concerned with this mighty and beneficent movement wherever it exists; for it is identified with the welfare of humanity. No doubt it mainly affects the rising generation; but whatever affects the young comes home to us very closely as individuals and as members of the community. But just now we are specially concerned with our own Sunday Schools in the several districts where we live and labour. It is natural that we should be most deeply interested in them; for they lie nearest to us; we are best acquainted with them; our thoughts and affections are centered in them; and it is our desire and prayer that they may be not only maintained, but rendered more efficient instruments in working out the purpose for which they now exist, viz., the religious training and education of the young.

The title of my paper implies that there is something wanting in our schools; that they are not what they might be. And in this I think you will all agree. We cannot rest satisfied with our poor and feeble attainments. We believe in the possibility of doing better, of learning more and more, of progress and improvement. We may learn even from our failures. And, while so believing, let us be thankful for what has been achieved, for the good that has been done, often in the face of difficulty and discouragement, in our Sunday Schools in town and country. And let us also note, as a matter of congratulation, that a school of some kind exists in connection with almost every one of our congregations; and in a few instances there are two schools carried on and supported by members of the same congregation. There is thus the recognition of duty to begin with, and, at the same time, there is some kind of provision for its fulfilment. We have everywhere some true-hearted friends who have given themselves to this work, and who, with unremitting diligence

and zeal, carry it forward. We have certain machinery in operation, and an impelling power, born of the true religious spirit. Our aim should be to make the machinery more effective, and to increase and utilise the impelling power.

From the first, if I am not mistaken, our schools have been congregational—that is to say, designed for the children of members of our churches—and, for the most part, they are so still; though here and there children from the outside are gathered in. They have also been Scriptural, by which term I mean that the Scriptures have been regularly read in the various classes, except the youngest; and where catechisms and other books have been used, the Bible, especially the New Testament, has been regarded as the basis of teaching and the principal class-book. The same remarks apply to the majority of existing schools. The teaching has consisted mainly in reading the Scriptures, learning and repeating certain texts and passages, in answering the questions in one or other of the catechisms. As to the teachers, it must be admitted that our ministers, almost without an exception, have identified themselves with our schools; and whether as superintendents or in class-work, they have thus enjoyed opportunities of coming into close contact with the younger members of their flocks, and exercising an influence upon them greater perhaps than they could in the pulpit. And they have been aided and encouraged by a faithful few, who happily exist even in the smallest congregation, and who, to their honour be it said, are almost always women. Without their valuable assistance, it is no exaggeration to say that many of our schools would ere long cease to be. In some instances we have had the services of gifted and educated teachers, but, for the most part, we have had to depend upon persons of very slender attainments; yet, notwithstanding, the good seed has been sown; pure, beautiful influences have been exerted; and deep and lasting impressions have been made. And for those things we should be thankful.

Now, if we think of our schools as they are, can we say that they show a marked improve-

ment as compared with what they were? As regards school accommodation, there is a gratifying change for the better. Within the past ten or twelve years, quite a number of handsome school buildings have sprung up here and there, affording ample room for the ordinary work of the schools, and also for week-evening meetings of classes and societies, all having in view some good and praiseworthy object. In the matter of attendance of scholars there is much to be desired. Although the membership of our churches is small as compared with other denominations, the number of scholars in attendance at our schools is considerably less than it might be, and a large proportion attend irregularly. It may be, indeed, that we lay too great stress on mere numbers, without thinking of efficient work in the respective classes. As regards teaching, I fear there is not much improvement. There is not sufficient preparation for the work on the part of those who engage in it. It is passed over too lightly, and, consequently, the golden opportunity to do good is lost. We have few or no tests of progress; we do not seem to approve of any system of examination or inspection; and, so far as I know, no scheme of systematic visitation has ever been carried out. So that, when one attempts to give some idea of schools as they are, the information forthcoming is rather scanty. We all know that reports and statistics from the several schools generally present the most favourable aspect of things, and many little shortcomings are apt to be passed over. We can scarcely judge of the condition of a school by the number in attendance, or the successful tea-meetings, entertainments, and other gatherings during the year. There is a temptation to make a display at an anniversary, or on special occasions, and to think too much of mere numbers, and lose sight of the great and primary aim of the institution as a means of exercising religious influence in the individual mind and heart.

Now, this healthful and elevating influence is to be exercised in the school by those who are entrusted with its management and working. We have the young committed to us for an

hour or two on the Sunday, and they gather around us in our classes, they come under our personal influence, as we come under theirs—and how do we discharge our responsibility? The time is very limited—how is it to be employed? Dare we as teachers enter upon the work lightly or inconsiderately, or without due preparation? These young people require to be taught the principles of morality and religion; their minds are open and receptive, their hearts are fresh and unsullied. What we believe to be good doctrine, what we have proved to be good, are we not bound to impart? The truths and principles which we have found wholesome and nourishing, the very bread of life to our souls, should we not give to the young? Now, I take it, we are all learners in the school of Christ; we look to him as our leader and guide in spiritual things, and our aim should be to lead the young to be his disciples, to learn of him, and be his true followers. In order to do this, we must as teachers be imbued with his spirit, we must be really religious, if our influence is to be good, if it is to be deep and lasting. Regarding this as the prime requisite, it is essential that we avail ourselves of every helpful agency in equipping ourselves for the right discharge of duty. Happily in these days the teacher is not left to his own unaided resources; he may have the assistance of co-workers in the same great field. Their books and manuals, thanks to the press, are within the reach of all, and the most gifted and experienced Sunday School helpers thus prove benefactors to their less favoured brethren. There is thus no reasonable excuse for those who do not endeavour to qualify themselves for the work, and make it as efficient as possible. We cannot do otherwise than admit that our schools are still lacking in teaching power; and herein, as it seems to me, lies our weakness. If we desire to make them more effective, there must be a change in this respect.

The feeling has been growing within me, and I doubt not you share it, that our people must take more interest in, and give greater support to, our Sunday Schools, if our churches are to live and thrive. Do parents co-operate

in this work as they should? do they regard it in its proper light? I hold that our schools have a right to a share of the best of our possessions—in fact, that we cannot give too much, we cannot do too much, to maintain them in an efficient condition. We ought not to be satisfied with the poorest and paltriest things in this service, with shabby and miserable rooms, worn-out, tattered books, and a careless slipshod style of teaching. In the old time, the choicest things were offered in sacrifice: there was no blemish in what was laid on the Lord's altar. But in these latter days we are too often satisfied with making an offering of that which costs us nothing. Might not our schoolrooms be brightened and beautified with advantage, in keeping with our glad and hopeful gospel? might not the range of our class-books be extended, so as to comprise more than the Bible, catechism, and hymn-book? Might not the excellent publications of our Sunday School Association be brought into more general use, and not be allowed to remain on the shelves of our Depositories, disregarded and unknown? Might not our teaching be improved, our lessons made more interesting and effective if these books were turned to good account? Might we not have in every school a library worthy of the name? Why should our teachers be drawn, as they generally are, from the ranks of the young and inexperienced? Does it not show that the Sunday School is not held in proper estimation when so few persons of education, age, and experience are willing to come forward, and take their share in the work? Here and there, indeed, we find examples of teachers of this stamp; and is not their presence and influence of a most beneficial character? "The most gifted in our congregation," says Channing, "cannot find a worthier field of labour than the Sunday School." The important concern is, not the number of scholars, not the kind of place you meet in, the treats, and prizes, and rewards you give, the various devices resorted to for the purpose of securing attendance, but what kind of teachers have you? Experience proves that the teachers make the school. If they are ill-

qualified or unfaithful, what can be expected of the scholars?

It is important that our scholars should be interested in the school; that they should be attached to it, and feel that it is a happy, cheerful place, where they will meet with kind friends who take a personal interest in them. I would dissociate from it all mere task-work and constraint, and make the room as comfortable as possible. In this matter, as in some others, we might learn a lesson from our American brethren. I think also that the scholars might be led to render more services; to take some part in school duties in addition to reading or hearing a class-lesson; and let them feel and understand it is their school, and they should take a pride in keeping everything in perfect condition. Some kind of society, or union, or band might be formed in connection with every school. We might have the Band of Hope, in favour of temperance; the Penny Bank, in favour of thrift; the Literary or Musical Society, the Book Club, the Cricket Club, the Society for Mutual Improvement. One or other of these might be found serviceable. Whatever tends to cultivate pure tastes and feelings, and form right habits, ought surely to be encouraged. It is a great point gained when we awaken a taste for reading and give it a healthy direction, and also when we help the young to cultivate an acquaintance with nature, and teach them to observe the wonders and beauties of the outward world. The essential thing for us is to endeavour to make religion as natural as possible; and, while we draw out lessons mainly from the Bible, we may find a religious meaning in nature and life, and from every experience learn something good and wise, and turn it to profitable account in our teaching.

Among the means of increasing the usefulness of our schools, probably some may be disposed to rank special services for the children. In our churches there does not appear to be the same necessity for these as elsewhere, because the children attend the ordinary service with their parents; whether they enjoy them or not is a question. I want an expression of opinion in regard to

Children's Services from the friends now present, who are better acquainted with it than I am, and also as to the possibility of improvement in the devotional services of our schools. In this particular I think we labour under some disadvantages which might be remedied. Services of Song and Flower Services might be given in connection with our schools, and prove most interesting and helpful; and a singing-class, properly conducted, would also be an important auxiliary. Another point perhaps worth considering is the giving of a general lesson before the close of the school. I have a pleasing remembrance of lessons of this kind in the school with which I was connected in early years, under the late Mr. Maginnis. They were looked forward to eagerly, and even the youngest scholar appeared to enjoy them. Five or ten minutes might be very profitably employed in reading a judicious selection in prose or poetry, or giving an address to the whole school.

I have now touched upon matters of importance, and I might mention some others. But I forbear. I want to suggest topics for consideration, and to elicit an expression of opinion on the part of friends well qualified to speak. For myself, I must candidly say, I am only a learner; and, after the experience of five-and-twenty years in the Sunday School, I feel that I am just beginning to understand the magnitude of the work and its responsibilities. I am sure we need to take a higher view of the whole work, and to be filled with fresh enthusiasm in carrying it forward. With all our educational advantages in the day schools of our land, there is a want which the Sunday School can alone supply. It has a sacred mission to fulfil, and no thoughtful Christian, man or woman, can disregard it. Outwardly estimated, indeed, this movement may seem of insignificant account; those who take part in it may feel that they are doing but little, and their best efforts may appear at times almost in vain. Yet, viewed aright, this cause has in it imperishable elements; it is identified with our best and dearest concerns; it deals with those principles which are the basis and the mainstay of character; its function is the

education of the young in virtue, in morals, in religion; and to be humble agents in carrying it forward to a more successful issue is, indeed, a high privilege, and may well lead us to renewed endeavours to be faithful."

After the paper, the first part of the proceedings concluded with hymn and prayer, and those present adjourned to the school-room to partake of the tea which had been provided for them by the Ballee friends.

After tea, the second part of the proceedings was commenced by the singing of a hymn.

The CHAIRMAN (Mr. Street) then called upon the Rev. E. S. Anthony to open the discussion.

Mr. ANTHONY said that if Mr. Thompson called himself inexperienced after so long practice, what must he (the speaker) be? He thought these Conferences were of great use as a stimulus to the teachers. It was a good thing to be reminded, as they had been that afternoon, of what their Sunday Schools should be, and what they may be made. In comparing the schools now with what they were in the past, we see that there has been great improvement, but also that there is still room for further development. One important point had been touched on by the essayist—it was not a new point—concerning the preparation of teachers. It had been well said that teachers should no more go unprepared to their classes than a minister to his pulpit. It needed to be said over and over again. Speaking with reference to the visiting of schools, he said that in England visitors go from one school to another, and thus are able to give reports, and to give hints of various kinds which are of great service. He thought the great object of Sunday School teachers to-day should be to make the children true disciples of Christ. They should have this moral and religious aim.

Mr. M'CALMONT said it was the first time he had been in Ballee; he hoped it would not be the last. They had been most hospitably received there. Speaking with reference to the paper, he said he thought premiums should not be given as a bribe to the children. To make their schools thoroughly successful they needed the co-operation of the sisters and mothers as well as of the ministers.

Rev. G. W. BANNISTER said that he thought that the teachers were too much taken from the young and inexperienced. It would greatly improve the efficiency of our schools if we could get more teachers, and especially experienced ones. Some men have special knowledge of special subjects. He thought it would be an advantage if such would go from one class to another and teach their particular subject. He said it had been complained that at the last meeting that too high standards had been placed before young teachers, and they were thus sent away dissatisfied. He thought it was a good thing for them to go away dissatisfied with themselves.

Rev. J. H. BIBBY (*pastor loci*) said how glad he and his congregation were to receive them at Ballee, and expressed the hope that they would come again. He felt he was in a quiet pasture while he was listening to that paper. He heard a great many homely and needful things. Mr. Bibby thought that Monthly Services for the children were a great advantage. He held them in Ballee, and the children appeared to be greatly disappointed if they missed one.

Rev. J. A. KELLY said he was glad to see so many present at the Conference. Much, he thought, might be done in the Sunday Schools by the hearty co-operation of the parents.

Rev. THOMAS DUNKERLEY spoke with reference to the books to be used, and how to use them. He had found that he required some system for his teaching. They used in his class Prof. Carpenter's *Life in Palestine*, and also Dr. Freeman Clark's *Unitarian Doctrine*. These enabled him to give a consistent idea of our theology. They often read only one passage and then conversed about it. It was wonderful, he said, how the scholars caught up the beauty of our faith. He thought when they went into the world they would be able to hold their own.

Mr. THOMAS M'CLELLAND moved a vote of thanks to Mr. Thompson for his paper. He expressed the pleasure he had in listening to him.

Dr. POLLY seconded the motion with great pleasure, especially as Mr. Thompson had been an old teacher of his.

The CHAIRMAN, in putting the resolution, said the speeches had of necessity been short, but each speaker had wisely kept to a special topic. He gave a short summary of the different matters introduced by the various speakers, and then said that he had been in the habit of giving a general lesson every Sunday in his own school to both teachers and scholars, and had found the plan very useful. He had been greatly satisfied and rewarded by the result.

The resolution was carried by acclamation.

Rev. DAVID THOMPSON, in reply, said he was very grateful for the hearty vote of thanks for his humble services. It was pleasure to him to be there, and to see old friends and make new ones. He thought there was nothing particular to reply to, the discussion having rather emphasised his paper.

Mr. DUNKERLEY moved a vote of thanks to the Ballee congregation and their minister, for the way in which they had received them.

Mr. KELLY briefly seconded the resolution, which was carried by acclamation.

Mr. GRACEY, replying for the Ballee congregation, said he thought the thanks were due rather to the visitors than to them for the Conference which they had held there. He said a disease spreads quickly through a school, and none quicker than moral earnestness. He thought it would be no harm if the minister in each school took a bad attack of it.

Mr. BANNISTER proposed a vote of thanks to the Chairman, which was carried by acclamation, and duly acknowledged by Mr. Street.

The proceedings then terminated with a hymn and prayer.

The Belfast visitors were loudly cheered as they drove away from the schools, and a fine drive into town brought a very successful outing to a conclusion.

LET our faith, which in darkness and coldness
hath lain,

Revive with the warmth and the brightness
again,

And, in blooming of flower and budding of tree,
The symbols and types of our destiny see.

—Whittier.

THE BIRD IN THE SOUL.

BY JASPER BARNETT COWDIN.

A bird is singing in my soul,
Softly, sweetly, in my soul,
Pouring forth a pleasant lay,
Singing to me every day.

When the rising sun is nigh,
Under rifts of rosy sky;
When the robin on the limb
Carols blithe his morning hymn;
When the flowers in their beds
Shake the dewdrops off their heads,
Smiling on me as I stroll,—
Then this little bird is singing,
Softly, sweetly, ever ringing
Silver music through my soul.

When the sun, with slanting ray,
Gilds the hills at close of day,
And the breeze hath died away;
When I sit within my bower
Dreaming through the quiet hour,
Listening to the murmurs low
Of the oriole on the bough,
A calmness breathing o'er the whole,—
Then this little bird is singing,
Softly, sweetly, ever ringing
Silver music through my soul.

When the ground is white with snow,
And the lordly tempests blow,
And the forest birds are gone
Southward to more genial zone,
Still this little bird stays near me,
With its faithful song to cheer me.

Years may come, their sorrows bringing,
Tides may ebb and tides may flow,
Winter come and summer go;
What care I how seasons roll,
While this little bird is singing
Softly, sweetly, in my soul?

Carol, carol, little bird!
Tenderer music ne'er was heard
Than thy mellow, gentle voice,
Making all my heart rejoice.
As down the quiet vale of life
I walk, nor mind the world's mad strife,
Oh let thy song hush to repose
Each sinful wish that passion knows;
And when, upon my pillow lying,
Friends will whisper I am dying,
And the plaintive night-wind, sighing,
Bears my spirit to its goal,
Let thy calm and peaceful note
In melodious echoes float
Softly, sweetly, through my soul.

THE BELFAST UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

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